

Testimony of The Honorable Roy Barnes  
Governor of the State of Georgia  
*before the*  
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation  
Hearing on Rail Passenger Service  
*in*  
Atlanta, Georgia  
December 6, 2000

I would like to thank Senator Cleland for bringing this hearing to Georgia. It is important that you are here, because our state faces several major environmental challenges as we attempt to improve transportation.

I commend Senator Cleland on his hard work on behalf of Georgia citizens to earmark the funds we will need to bring our transportation program to fruition. Without his help, and the help of many of our Congressional delegation—including our late, great friend, Senator Paul Coverdell—we would not be as far along as we are. I also want to thank Secretary Slater and Administrator Molitoris for their help and assistance in extending the high-speed routes in our state.

It is our hope that the Southeast will be able to link together through transportation initiatives and that Georgia will play a significant part in that system.

But right now we need your help in freeing up the financial resources that have been appropriated so that we can get our commuter and intercity passenger rail program moving forward.

In 1998, at the beginning of my administration, the EPA directed that federal dollars could not be spent on our roads or highways. We arrived at this state of affairs because the local governments in the region would not work with each other. In the 18-county

metropolitan region that is “Atlanta,” there are over 80 separate governmental jurisdictions. Each one is completely confident in its own course of action, and somewhat suspicious of anyone else.

The Atlanta Regional Commission, one of the first Metropolitan Planning Organizations in the country, is in charge of helping these metro counties come up with a regional transportation plan. Unfortunately, it had no power to carry out its mission. We needed an agency that had the power to create and enforce a regional air quality plan.

At the time, The Atlanta Chamber of Commerce had just completed a months-long study of the region’s transportation challenges, and from their report came the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority. Primarily, we designed GRTA to implement the ARC’s plan, to give it the power it must have to actually make a difference.

The lack of cooperation that we saw among the local governments was also apparent among the departments of State government especially in dealing with our passenger rail program. As a result, we formed the Program Management Team (PMT) to coordinate and direct our passenger rail effort. Sonny Deriso of Albany, who is vice-chairman of the GRTA board, heads up this team.

I encourage our state agencies, Federal partners and elected officials to continue to support our efforts in Georgia to improve transportation and most importantly air quality. There is much more that we need to accomplish if we intend to see passenger rail operating in Georgia.